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Part 1: News Analysis

The unveiling this week of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, in Ashgabat, was the symbolic crowning achievement of nearly a year of effort by Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov to bring Turkmenistan out of decades of international isolation. But the Centre is a reflection of the country's actual state of affairs: theoretically progressive on international issues such as counter-terrorism and economic development, but, without adequate freedom to access information, travel, or engage society freely, restricted and with an uncertain future.

The mission of the new UN-supported organization, with an initial budget of \$2.3 million and a senior director to be appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, is to avoid the human and economic cost of war by building capacity to prevent conflict, facilitate dialogue, and assist "in catalyzing international support behind projects and initiatives." In greetings read at the opening ceremony, which were attended by UN and OSCE officials, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon and other regional leaders, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said the new institution "holds tremendous promise" for reducing the potential threat from conflicts and other cross-border challenges, such as drug trafficking, terrorism and environmental degradation. President Rakhmon also spent three days in Ashgabat holding talks with the Turkmen leadership and UN representatives, noting Turkmenistan's role in securing a peaceful outcome to Tajikistan's civil war and its continuing role in providing energy and political stability to the region, particularly to its volatile neighbor Afghanistan.

Meetings with OSCE and NATO officials following the UN Centre's opening underscored Turkmenistan's increasing willingness to expand ties to multilateral organizations. President Berdymukhamedov accepted an invitation to attend a NATO meeting in Brussels in April 2008. While the OSCE's president expressed confidence in further cooperation, a report issued by OSCE on human right defenders this week indicated that the organization remains concerned about human rights violations.

Although the UN Centre was launched on December 10, International Human Rights Day, President Berdymukhamedov did not mention the date, but said the opening was tied rather to December 12, Neutrality Day for Turkmenistan. A U.S. delegation headed by Deputy U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Erica Barks-Ruggles, visiting Ashgabat to attend the opening of the UN Centre, raised continuing Western concerns about political liberties, and urged the review of cases of prisoners tried for political reasons, as well as increased freedom of the press and non-governmental groups.

The symbolism of the UN Centre stood in stark contrast to the Soviet-style elections held the same week to local people's councils. The state claimed turnout was an implausible 98.5 percent.

But some progress toward transparency was seen this week as President Berdymukhamedov reprimanded the state media for not covering the news sufficiently with modern technology, and agreed with the UN to work on declassifying much-needed government statistics to help create a more accurate picture of economic and social issues in Turkmenistan.

Part 2: News Digest

Summary: Turkmenistan opened the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in Ashgabat, with UN, NATO, OSCE, US, EU and regional government representatives in attendance. The Centre is to work on cross-border issues and regional stabilization. A US delegation called for review of cases of political prisoners, and local elections yielded an implausible 98% turnout.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. UN Secretary General Launches UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in Ashgabat

Original title: *Preventive Diplomacy Essential, Ban Ki-moon Tells Launch of UN Regional Centre*

Source: *UN News Center/12/10/07*

Full version: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=24991&Cr=central&Cr1=asia>

Preventive diplomacy is not an option but a necessity, given the gravity of so many situations worldwide, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was quoted as saying today, launching the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

In a message delivered on his behalf by B. Lynn Pascoe, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Ban said the new Centre – located in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan – “holds tremendous promise” for reducing the potential threat from conflicts and other cross-border challenges, such as drug trafficking, terrorism and environmental degradation.

“As we all know too well, dealing with the aftermath of violent conflict is costly,” the message said. “Lives are needlessly lost. Economies are destroyed. Hopes for development are dashed. Resolving conflicts before violence occurs is one of the smartest investments we can make.”

Known by its acronym UNRCCA, the Centre is tasked with assisting the Governments of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan (sic) and Uzbekistan “in building capacities to peacefully prevent conflict, in facilitating dialogue, and in catalyzing international support behind projects and initiatives,” according to the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), which has set it up. The Centre will be headed by a senior representative of Mr. Ban and has been awarded an initial budget of \$2.3 million and a small international staff contingent.

[Passage omitted on cooperation with other UN agencies and regional organizations, and progress made by Central Asian nations in mutual cooperation. Passage omitted on benefits of prevention versus expenditures on peace-keeping.]

General Assembly President Srđjan Kerim, in his own message to mark the Centre’s inauguration, said that too often in the past the international community had only paid “lip service” to the concept of preventive diplomacy. “In Central Asia we are taking a concrete step now... All this together may serve as a further boost and example for other Member States to take collective action on a regional as well as global level in preventive diplomacy.”

b. Turkmen President Opens New UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat

Original title: *Speech by President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov at the Ceremony on the Opening of the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (Ashgabat, December 10, 2007). Translated and excerpted by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Source: *Official Turkmen Government website/12/10/07*

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=071210e>

Excerpt: [Passage omitted: greetings.]

I am especially grateful to the leaders of our respected neighbors in the Central Asia region, who have chosen Ashgabat for the location of the Center. The ceremonial opening is our common holiday. I would like to thank UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council for their constructiveness and cooperation shown in deciding the issue of founding the Center. I consider this testimony of great attention from the international community to the processes underway in Central Asia, and careful understanding of the role and significance of our region in global affairs, and the urge to provide the maximum positive assistance in resolving regional problems, and reaching long-term goals for the security, stability, cooperation, and sustainable development of the peoples and states of the Central Asian region. [Passage omitted on selection of Ashgabat as location.]

[Passage omitted on significance of opening.]

For the first time in the history of Central Asia, a permanently operating working body is being created which is charged with serving as the catalyst for political dialogue in the region, to prevent conflicts and to develop joint decisions taking into account the UN's established political and legal mechanisms. A serious step is being made toward forming a new political psychology free of prejudices and suspicion, outdated dogmas and stereotypes. [Passage omitted on international community's desire to see stability in the region.] Critical in this work is the reliance on the political and legal mechanisms of the UN, based on respect of sovereignty of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, equality, and good will.

[Passage omitted on Central Asia as cradle of civilization and legacy of the Silk Road.]

Unfortunately, the history of Central Asia has known other periods -- periods of decline, internal conflicts, fratricidal wars, as a rule for foreign interests which had nothing in common with the authentic aspirations of the peoples living here. This could not help but leave a mark on people's consciousnesses and leave an imprint on the current situation. Many of the problems of the region, the presence of stereotypes and prejudices, and the tension that at times arises on religious and ethnic grounds have roots in the past. Our common task, the task of politicians, diplomats, public figures and the media is to do everything possible to establish constructive dialogue and the development of a new, non-confrontational approach to the resolving of problems emerging, through the activating the mechanism, to use medical language, for their early diagnosis and warning. Coordinating this work, finding innovative and flexible solutions, to create the necessary political and psychological conditions for their resolution are among the chief lines of work of the UN Regional Centre.

[Passage omitted on acquiring of sovereignty in the 1990s.] We recognize the serious negative factors which have influenced our region and which prevent a dynamic and open development of multilateral relations. Above all, I mean such common threats for Central Asia as drug-trafficking, transnational organized crime, attempts to promulgate and inculcate radical, extremist religious ideology which has nothing in common with authentic Islam. Is it possible to effectively withstand these threats acting alone? Is it sufficient to fight them only with methods of force? Practice has shown that this is not the case. [Passage omitted on coordination work of the Centre which will not substitute for specialized national institutions.]

The creation within the framework of the UN Regional Center of a multilateral consultative and negotiations mechanism is capable of having the most positive influence on the coordination of approaches in matters of social and economic development of the region, establishment of cooperation on the basis of equal rights and mutual advantages on energy supply, transport communications, and the humanitarian sphere. [Passage omitted on importance of UN's experience.]

[Passage omitted on Central Asia's potential.]

Today, our countries are not alone in resolving these tasks. We see interested participation and support of the international community in the person of the United Nations, visible confirmation of which is the opening in our region of the UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy. Its activity is only beginning, there is much to be done to establish effective methods and forms of work and to establish constructive relations with governments, civic organizations, and incorporate modern models of communication and dialogue.

[Passage omitted on closing remarks of thanks.]

c. UN To Help Turkmenistan Build Transparent Statistics System

Source: ITAR-TASS/12/09/07. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Synopsis: The UN will help Turkmenistan establish an objective and transparent system of statistics, ITAR TASS reported. UN Assistant Secretary General Kori Udovicki. Director of the Regional UNDP Bureau for European and CIS presented the draft agreement in Ashgabat at a meeting with President Berdymukhamedov and Turkmen government officials on December 9

Statistical data have long been considered classified information, and the media has not published much statistical reports on social and economic development, says ITAR TASS. At this moment, all statistical data in this country fall into the category of classified information, and mass media have long ago stopped publishing monthly statistics reports on social and economic development.

President Berdymukhamedov has insisted on prompt and accurate statistical reporting as part of his reports. "We must have an unbiased picture of what is happening today in the industries and other sectors so as to be able to do something tomorrow," ITAR-TASS quoted him as saying.

As President Berdymukhamedov received Udovicki, officials also presented a draft agreement between Turkmenistan and the UN on improvements in managerial agencies in this country - another document drafted at the initiative of President Berdymukhamedov

d. U.S. Urges Turkmenistan to Allow More Liberties

Source: Reuters/12/10/07. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSL1056576320071210?feedType=RSS&feedName=politicsNews>

Synopsis: U.S. officials visiting Turkmenistan urged Turkmen officials to take more concrete actions to improve human rights protection and review jail sentences handed down under the nation's previous leader, Saparmurat Niyazov, Reuters reported.

Deputy U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Erica Barks-Ruggles met with Turkmen officials and rights activist and held a news conference December 9 in Ashgabat. She urged the government to review prison sentences of Niyazov's jailed opponents.

"If people are going to be charged, they are to be tried and charged by an open court and if they are not, they need to be released," Barks-Ruggles said. The State Department is concerned with state restrictions on foreign travel by Turkmen citizens, she said, also urging the government to ease control over media and make it easier to register civic organizations.

"We believe freedom of movement to be a fundamental right. It is important for international relations, business and education," she said. "It is very important. We believe any step to limit access to information would be a step backward," she added.

e. US Delegation Upbeat on Turkmen Democracy Progress - TV

Source: TV Altyn Asyr/12/08/07.

Full version: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idUKL0550597020071205>

Presenter] As we reported earlier, a delegation headed by Erica Barks-Ruggles, deputy assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labour is on a visit in Ashgabat. Within the framework of the visit, the guests held a number of meetings and talks to discuss bilateral partnership.

[Correspondent] The guests met the chairperson of the national parliament where the delegation members were briefed on the reforms successfully carried out in the spheres of social protection and education.

[Passage omitted: the guests were briefed on election system]

The US delegation was received at the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights and the Council on Religious Affairs under the president of Turkmenistan, the Justice Ministry and also at the Central Electoral Commission.

During the meetings, the guests were briefed on the progress in the spheres of democracy, civil rights, labour and social protection. The US delegation members headed by Erica Barks-Ruggles noted that reforms being

carried out in Turkmenistan and the current elections to local councils showed that the country was confidently heading along the path of democracy.

f. OSCE Releases Report on Human Rights Defenders; Turkmen Government Denies Allegations of Abuse

Source: OSCE Human Rights Body Raises Concerns of Attacks and Restrictions on Human Rights Defenders. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full Version: <http://www.osce.org/item/28770.html>

The report can be accessed at: <http://www.osce.org/item/28760.html>

Synopsis: On International Human Rights Day, December 10, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) released a 71-page report titled *Human Rights Defenders in the OSCE Region: Our Collective Conscience*, OSCE reported on its website. The report contains mention of attacks on human rights defenders in Turkmenistan in the section on "Threats to, And Attacks on, the Physical Integrity of Human Rights Defenders."

The Government of Turkmenistan commented on a number of individual cases in the report (see footnotes 17, 74, 106, 109). Regarding the case of Ogulsapar Muradova, the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist who died in custody in 2006, the Turkmen government responded by referring to its previous statement in the OSCE Permanent Council, says the report: "Ms. Muradova was provided with legal representation at all times and had been advised of her right to appeal, that her relatives had been notified of her death, that it had been announced that an autopsy would be carried out, and that she had been in poor health. The Government maintains she was neither a journalist nor a human rights defender, and rejects any suggestion that her death was other than as a result of natural causes."

The Government of Turkmenistan also questioned the case of Annakurban Amanklychev and also disputed that he was a human rights defender, says the OSCE report. The Turkmen authorities denied that Muradova, Sapardurdy Khajiev, and Amankurban Amanklychev were refused access to counsel. According to OSCE, HRW reported that "the three were held incommunicado for over a month, reportedly without access to counsel, amid allegations they were being forced to confess under duress."

Regarding the case of Kakabai Tejenov, reported originally by Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Turkmen Government denies that he was ever detained or forcefully confined in any medical institution, reported OSCE. HRW reported that he was "forcibly committed to hospitalization for nine months after sending a letter abroad complaining about human rights violations in his country," said the OSCE report.

g. OSCE Interested in Continuing Cooperation with Turkmenistan

Source: turkmenistan.ru/12/11/07. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11819&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon traveled to Ashgabat December 10-13 to seek deliveries of Turkmen energy, ITAR-TASS reported. "My country has strictly limited the consumption of electric power, so we need the imports of electricity and fuel," ITAR-TASS quoted him as saying. "I have asked the Turkmen president to set quotas on the deliveries of petroleum products, liquefied natural gas and a number of prime commodities to Tajikistan."

President Berdymukhamedov said Turkmenistan would continue to develop close cooperation with Tajikistan, and had agreed to export to it one billion kilowatt/hours of electricity to Tajikistan. Regarding the request to increase electricity quotas, Berdymukhamedov indicated that a new power plant commissioned in Dashoguz could increase exports.

The Tajik president completed his visit, saying it was his fifth meeting with President Berdymukhamedov and he was satisfied that agreements were reached. "[T]he two countries will launch air links and a transport corridor will be opened. We agreed on boosting the supplies of electricity, gas, fuel and lubricants to Tajikistan. Tajikistan, for its part, will export aluminum to Turkmenistan, in accordance with Turkmenistan's needs," he added.

h. President of Turkmenistan to Attend NATO Summit

Source: *turkmenistan.ru/12/11/07. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11829&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Robert Simmons, NATO Special Representative of the Caucasus and Central Asia conveyed an invitation Turkmen President Berdymukhamedov to take part in a meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in Budapest in April 2008, *turkmenistan.ru* reported, citing the Turkmen State News Agency (TDH). Simmons and NATO's country officer for Turkmenistan, Lorenz Meyer-Minnemann, were in Ashgabat to attend the opening of the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia.

"As Robert Simons noted, NATO attaches great importance to cooperation with neutral Turkmenistan that is playing a crucial role in the Central Asian region which is evidenced by the exceptionally successful and productive talks in Brussels," reported *turkmenistan.ru*.

i. Turkmenistan Agrees to More Electricity Deliveries for Tajikistan

Source: *ITAR-TASS/12/10/07; 12/11/07. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Full version: <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=12163000&PageNum=0>

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During the visit, agreements were also signed to set up joint ventures, prevent double taxation and capital gain tax evasion. The two countries also agreed to provide mutual protection of classified information. The Tajik president attended the opening of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia and then continued to the city of Turkmenbashi to visit the Avaza tourist zone and oil refineries on the Caspian coast.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Turkmen Leader Slams Media for Failures, Introduces Holiday to Mark Id al-Fitr

Source: *FBIS/TV Altyn Asyr/12/07/07*

Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov has harshly criticized the country's media for "failing" to report on the events taking place in the country. Berdymukhamedov's remarks made at a government session on 8 December, were reported by the Altyn Asyr TV channel on the same day.

"The esteemed president, having noted the importance of timely briefing of the domestic and international public on events taking place in the country, criticized the media for failing to act up to present-day

requirements," the report said adding that the president expressed a "particular dissatisfaction" with the work of the presidential press secretary, Akmyrat Hudayberdiyev, and the deputy prime minister in charge of media and cultural issues, Maysa Yazmuhammedova. In this connection Berdymukhamedov ordered to "clear the media from flippant people and replace them by those who can work hard," the report said.

The government meeting also discussed the preparations for a ceremonial opening of a UN regional centre in Ashgabat and for the country's national holiday, Neutrality Day, to be marked on 12 December. At the meeting, the president signed a decree on declaring 20, 21 and 22 December days off to celebrate Id al-Fitr. The issue of marking the remembrance of the late president, Saparmurat Niyazov, which falls on 21 December, will be considered later, the report added.]

b. Turkmenistan Holds Elections to Local People's Councils, Reports 98.58% Turnout

Source: turkmenistan.ru/12/09/07. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11801&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Elections to local representative bodies of the Halk Maslakhaty (People's Council) were held December 9 in Ashgabat, the newly-established Ruhubelent District of Dashoguz Province, and other provinces, turkmenistan.ru reported. The Central Election Commission said at least 2 candidates ran for seats in each council, and that 98.58 percent of voters reportedly turned out for the vote.

The local people's councils are mandated to implement Turkmenistan's laws, decisions by the Halk Maslakhaty and acts by the Halk Maslakhaty chairman, the president of Turkmenistan. They are also responsible for implementing programs for economic, social and cultural development and other issues under their jurisdiction.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. Film-Makers Shine Spotlight on Siemens' Cooperation with Turkmen Government

Original Title: *Siemens in Focus* on freedomforsale.org

Source: freedomforsale.org/12/10/07 and chrono-tm.org/Turkmen Initiative for Human rights. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?025704361100000000000011000000>

For more information about the film see: <http://www.freedomforsale.org/index.php?req=article00009&ref=frontpage>

Synopsis: A Finnish documentary film titled "Nokia-Siemens Avoids Discussion" investigates the issues of the German company's operation in Turkmenistan, Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights reported, citing freedomforsale.org, a website publicizing issues of human rights concern.

Siemens is one of the Western companies that supported the translation of the Ruhnama, the cult book written and promulgated by Saparmurat Niyazov, previous leader of Turkmenistan. Foreign companies agreed to publish the work, mandated in schools and workplaces, to gain access to petroleum business, said the website. Siemens has reportedly installed a surveillance system for the Turkmen government which has been used to arrest and jail opposition activists, and to spy on foreign embassies and international organizations, the website said.

The website highlighted the role of Shell in Turkmenistan last month, and also released a film, "Shadow of the Holy Book," which premiered at an international film festival last week. In January the target of the website's investigation will be Bouygues, one of the world's largest construction companies, which has a number of projects in Turkmenistan.

b. New Power Plant Opened in Dashoguz

Source: turkmenistan.ru/12/08/07. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11784&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: A state power plant built for US \$120 million by a Turkish firm with two General Electric gas turbine generators was opened in the town of Dashoguz on December 7, turkmenistan.ru reported. The plant is expected to produce over 1.5 billion kilowatts of electricity per year. Dashoguz province uses about 120 mega watts per hour, and the remainder will be channeled to the rest of Turkmenistan, as well as exported to Turkey, Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul attended the ceremony.

c. Russia Approves Negotiations to Reach Tripartite Agreement on Caspian Pipeline

Original title: *RF Approves Caspian Gas Coop With Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan.* Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: ITAR-TASS/12/12/07

Full version: <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=12173586&PageNum=0>

Synopsis: The Russian government has approved a Caspian gas pipeline cooperation agreement with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, ITAR-TASS reported, citing a resolution signed by Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov December 12. Vice-Minister Sergei Naryshkin said the project would begin implementation in the second half of 2008.

The Russian prime minister has instructed the Fuel and Energy Ministry together with the Russian Foreign Ministry to hold talks with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to "reach agreement on signing this agreement," ITAR-TASS reported.

A declaration by the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan was signed in May 2007 at a summit in Astana, but finalization of the agreement lagged until agreement was reached to raise the price of Turkmen gas for Russia to US \$130 per 1,000 cm³ in the first half of 2008, and US \$150 in the second half of next year, after which the price will be calculated on the basis of market rates.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations have been prepared by OSI's Turkmenistan Project.

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